

**Order in Asia beyond power transition:
Understanding China's rise, changing international roles and grand strategies**

REVIEW ARTICLE

Chinese Hegemony. Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 261 pages, ISBN 978-0-8047-9389-6. Hardcover, \$65. Feng Zhang, 2015.

China's International Roles. London: Routledge, 263 pages, ISBN 978-1-138-90381-4, \$148.00. Sebastian Harnisch, Sebastian Bersick, and Jörn-Carsten Gottwald, editors, 2016.

Power Transition and International Order in Asia. Issues and Challenges. London: Routledge, 222 pages, ISBN 978-0-415-85842-7. Paperback, \$44.95, Peter Shearman, ed., 2014.

Russia-China Relations in the post-Crisis International Order. London: Routledge, 174 pages, ISBN 978-1-138-79659-1. Hardcover, \$163.00. Marcin Kaczmarek, 2015.

Keywords: China; US-China relations; power transition theory; order; Asia; grand strategy; Confucianism; Thucydides's trap; role theory; ethical relationalism.

Abstract

This article takes stock of the advances in research on the implications of China's rise for regional order in East Asia. Together, the four books discussed in this essay contribute to scholarly debates thus far by and large informed by power transition theory. Specifically, the books' main contribution is to return interactions and relationships to the mainstream of International Relations whilst also making China central to theorizing in the field. They draw on constructivist and critical approaches and contribute refreshing theoretical insights, thoughtfully blended with sociological and historical reflections. The authors also discuss a wide range of empirical issues relating to the changes in East Asian regional order, from financial and economic governance to China's various strategic interactions and the Sino-Russian relationship. As power transition theory has received considerable attention of late, this author calls on scholars to pay more attention to other theoretical approaches and to new empirical issues that illustrate China's approach to regional and global affairs.

Introduction

The backdrop - explicit or implicit - to the themes discussed in the four books under review in this article is the ‘Thucydides’s trap’. Coined by Harvard historian Graham Allison, the terms refers to a situation wherein a rising power challenges an established great power (Allison, 2017). As he reminds us in his wonderfully-timed *Destined for War*, “it was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable” (Allison, 2017, pp. vii). China’s rapid rise and US decline closely resembles that power transition. The possibility of war in East Asia has increased in 2017, mainly as a result of two circumstances, the heightened tensions between Washington and Beijing due to President Xi Jinping’s more assertive approach and America’s increasingly populist and economic nationalist line under President Donald Trump. Beyond this, the North Korean crisis - rendered more acute by Pyongyang’s increasingly frequent launches of intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear tests - has made the risks of strategic miscalculation and thus an ensuing outbreak of war in Asia conceivable. This is not to say that war is likely to be started deliberately, but the parties engaged in the region may stumble into war due to their own miscalculations. Such a reality already played out once during the Korean War in the 1950s. With North Korea as China’s only formal ally at the current time, and the only country over which Beijing has gone to war against the United States, it is by no means impossible that war between Washington and Pyongyang could quickly spread to involve Beijing. Given this very serious context, Shearman correctly observed that it is curious why there has been a dearth of theorizing about China in contemporary International Relations (2014, pp. 8-10). Nevertheless, this gap is now being bridged and has led to fruitful exchanges between IR scholars and scholars of China over the past fifteen years.

The books reviewed here all ask important questions about the effects of China’s rise on East Asia and its relationships with near and distant powers. Although war is by no means inevitable, avoiding it will require a great deal of effort and careful management of the relationship between China and the United States. Handling the rise of China – and what it means for other countries - will be the single greatest challenge of the 21st century (Allison, 2017). *Chinese Hegemony* by Zhang (2015) and *China’s International Roles* by Harnisch, Bersick and Gottwald (2016) make extensive use of primary sources and have a solid grounding in imperial and modern Chinese history.

Harnisch et al. apply tools from role theory to interrogate how China's history and identity have shaped her foreign policy and, by extension, the evolution of her international role over the past one hundred years. Zhang examines Chinese hegemony during the early Ming dynasty (1368-1424) through an empirically rich and theoretically ambitious analysis of East Asian order and the variety of China's relationships with Japan, Korea and Mongolia: the grand strategies of China and her neighbors, as well as the institutional foundations of East Asian international society. Drawing on constructivist approaches to IR and using sociological and historical reflections, *Chinese Hegemony* and *China's International Roles* offer new theoretical insights into China's rise and China-US relations that will help readers understand those issues in historical and comparative context. While *Power Transition* and *International Order in Asia* embrace, to varying extents, power transition theory, the other two books seek to go beyond the dichotomy between power transition theory and balance of power in order to make a convincing case for alternative theoretical frameworks to capture the dynamics and consequences of US-China relations in Asia. Taken together, the books' added value is two-fold: one, they return interactions and relationships to the analytical centre stage of International Relations; two, they place China squarely at the centre of contemporary IR theorizing.

The next section outlines the existing theoretical debates on China's rise with which the four books engage. It is followed by an examination of the specific contributions of each work to these debates, highlighting their differences and commonalities. Finally, the author identifies some of the limitations of current scholarship and recommends areas for future research.

China's rise, power shifts and order in Asia

The mode and implications of China's economic and political rise are, understandably, amongst the most widely and hotly debated topics in academia, the policy community and the media. As Zhang correctly observes, the subject of controversy is neither the sources nor the extent

of China's rise, but rather its implications on regional and global order.¹ There are two camps in this current debate – one is informed by Organski's power transition theory (Organski, 1958), and the other by balance of power theory which is closer to Henry Kissinger's worldview (Kissinger, 2012, 2014).

Power transition has a long and distinguished history in IR, with scholars showing a particular inclination to scrutinize its evolution (Di Cicco & Levy, 1999; Efird, Kugler & Genna, 2003) and test its empirical validity (Beeson, 2009; Chan, 2004; Foot, 2017; Goldstein, 2007). The most recent incarnation of power transition theory has provided a framework for scholars to debate the timing of war between the declining hegemon (the US) and the rising power (China) and conditions under which war is likely to break out (Lemke & Tammen, 2003; Lim, 2015; Tammen & Kugler, 2006; Allison, 2017). In an attempt to provide an answer to these questions, Allison draws on historical accounts from the past 500 years and finds that war occurred in 12 out of 16 cases wherein an established great power was challenged by a rising power (Allison, 2017). War resulted from the rising power's sense of entitlement and the declining hegemon's "fear, insecurity and determination to defend the status quo" (Allison, 2017, p. 39). Allison argues that fear, honor and self-interest – domestic hysteria and years of building tensions – contributed to the outbreak of war. The atmosphere in East Asia in 2017 bears a very close resemblance to Allison's description of these historical cases of power transition. The key question for us, therefore, is whether the US and China can escape Thucydides's trap.

Although power transition theory is now the prevailing analytical approach to US-China relations, the theory is hotly debated and has attracted criticism for the weakness of the empirical evidence (Harris, 2014; Lebow & Valentino, 2009; Harris, 2014; Cox, 2014; Buruma, 2017). Balance of power theory has made equally important contributions and its utility is most lucidly illustrated in Kissinger's (2012, 2014) analyses of China and world order. Kissinger ponders whether a change in Asian regional order will occur through confrontation or partnership (2014, p. 212). He notes that Western and Chinese conceptualizations of regional order are informed by starkly different historical experiences, journeys and reflections upon their significance.

¹ Cox (2014) and Buruma (2017) openly question the dogma of China's rise (that it already occurred and that we have already made the transition to a post-Western world). French (2017) provides a more nuanced critique.

Westphalian sovereignty, insofar as it has ever existed, is clearly at odds with the *tianxia* (天下, “all under heavens”) principle of Chinese imperial order (French, 2017) where “China is the central civilized part [...] inspiring and uplifting the rest of humanity” (Kissinger 2014, p. 213). Thus, in imperial China, “world order reflected a universal hierarchy, not an equilibrium of competing sovereign states” (Kissinger 2014, p. 213). At the core of this collision between two conceptualizations of world order lies another question: “was China a world order unto itself or a state like others that was part of a wider international system” (Kissinger, 2014, p. 219)? China’s turbulent twentieth century saw the collapse of her empire and a revolution which dragged China into a system in which it was a clear rule-taker; but its recent revival is marked not only by its more active participation in the current system, but also in a quest for the re-writing of its rules, i.e. as a rule-maker. Despite these differences, “the United States and China are both indispensable pillars of world order” (Kissinger, 2014, p. 226) and if these two powers are to manage their relationship constructively, a way to accommodate their differences must be found.

The four books intervene in such debates and seek answers to broadly similar questions: how can the US-China relationship be managed? Is war inevitable and if not, how should it be avoided? Is China dissatisfied with the status quo? Is China a revisionist power? What kind of order does China want? What can we learn from re-examining China’s past and its past relationships that would be relevant in understanding the changing East Asian order?

Common themes and contributions

The four volumes under review advance our understanding of China’s interactions with her neighbors and offer some clues on what can be expected in the decades ahead. The in-depth historical case studies include Ming-era imperial China (Zhang), the past century (Harnisch et al.’s edited volume), a discussion of the last twenty-five years of Russia-China relations (Kaczmarek) and a set of empirical issues pertaining to issues of order in Asia (Shearman’s edited volume).

Will China contribute to or challenge the international order? Assuming that China wants a greater say in how order is maintained, what kind of world order would China like and how

would its response to crises differ from an order designed and led by the West? To answer these questions, the two most important contributions come from Zhang's *Chinese hegemony* and Harnisch et al.'s *China's International Roles*, which are theoretically sophisticated, very well-researched and of great empirical value to specialists in IR and Chinese history and politics. *China's International Roles* examines changes in China's international roles over the past century, tracing the links between domestic and external expectations of China's role conception and preferred relationships with the US, Japan, the EU, other socialist countries and a whole range of international institutions and organizations. The volume provides a systematic account of changes in China's roles and the mechanisms of role-taking. Taking the long view is important as international roles are understood as "social phenomena whose content has varied over time and space" (Harnisch et al., 2016, p. x) and are the primary components of international social structures. Both tend to change incrementally. The book is organized into three sections - the first embeds the study in the broader debates on role theory, the second examines China's evolving global role and the third analyzes her evolving relationships with individual countries, organizations and regions. They explain China's international roles, how they have developed over time and how they influence Beijing's foreign conduct. Although it is sometimes heavy on theory, particularly in the first section (chapters 1-5) which could have been condensed, this volume sheds light on international roles as social structures emerging from processes of self-identification, contestation of domestic roles and international interaction (Harnisch et al., 2016, p. 3). The volume locates itself in the broad field of foreign policy analysis, in which it identifies a gap in the study of international roles and identities on a conceptual level, and another, empirically, in the prevailing focus on 'external expectations in the processes of socialization, mimicking, or imitation' (Harnisch, 2016, p. 3), meaning that 'the literature [...] lacks a set of mechanisms to explain China's differentiated integrated into the international order' (Harnisch, 2016, p. 4). Contra those claims, Harnisch argues that a full understanding of China's place in the international system and its positioning in the international social order requires taking international roles as 'social structures' seriously. To do so means incorporating processes of self-identification, domestic contestation and alter-casting into the analysis as these are central to both the current internal debate on China's role (Harnisch, 2016, p. 3). The volume's contributors ultimately posit that role theory should take self-identification, domestic contestation, and other modes of interaction much more seriously as causal mechanisms for self-binding behavior by role-holders. No less valuable

is the fact that unlike many edited books, this volume is a cohesive and coherent collective effort structured around a common theoretical framework and a common set of guiding questions which is no small achievement for an edited work.

Zhang's *Chinese Hegemony* is an ambitious contribution to scholarship on China and Chinese history and to political theory and contemporary IR theory. Investigations of diplomatic history and, more generally, attempts to bring history and IR into a close and mutually enriching conversation have become more popular of late, and Zhang's enquiry is also valuable to this strand of scholarship.² The author's inquiry into early Ming-era imperial China (1368-1424) is a sophisticated piece of work that integrates insights and tools from history and IR to understand and explain the central pillars of Chinese hegemony at a specific moment in time. Zhang claims that the regional order in East Asia is based on the distinctive nature of China's imperial order (*tianxia*), the role of Confucian ethics in shaping China's conduct with its neighbours and the importance of a whole range of relationships where the well-known and often mis-cited "tribute system" is but one. The key here is the notion of *relationality* which Zhang defines as "the dynamic process of connections and transactions among actors in structured social relationships, as opposed to their substances and attributes" (2015, p. 5). As such, when imperial China appeared to be a world unto herself, that world order was not simply an endogenous product; in other words, it was not single-handedly produced and maintained, but was the result of "grand strategic interaction and fundamental institutional practices" (Zhang, 2015, p. 5).

Zhang proceeds to test this theory through case studies of China's relations with Korea, Japan and Mongolia during the early Ming era, emphasizing that China's conduct can only be explained by understanding how those powers related to China and her emperor. Chinese hegemony was distinctive, Zhang claims, because it rested on two key founding blocks – one, the grand strategy of China, Korea, Japan and Mongolia and their strategic interactions, and, two, a series of institutions which defined East Asian international society. Drawing on both Western (the English school) and Chinese intellectual traditions (most notably those according great significance to expressive rationality as the illustration of Confucian relational affection), Zhang calls for a critical normative IR theory centered on the concept of *ethical relationalism*. The

² For a critical take on the use of historical analogies in international relations see Jeffery (Jeffery, 2009).

concept of relationalism emphasizes the “dynamic processes of connections and transactions, as opposed to substances and isolated actors” (Zhang, 2015, p. 175). In this perspective, Confucian ethics are in China’s foreign policy conduct (Zhang, 2015, pp. 3-4). Zhang argues that the Confucian value of “humaneness” (expressive rationality as opposed to instrumental rationality), was a guiding principle of Ming-era Chinese international relations, even though instrumental rationality occasionally emerged in China’s relations with the three countries considered. Zhang contends that in contemporary China a reinterpreted Confucianism gives the Chinese people a sense of purpose and the Communist Party a new *raison d’être*, domestically and internationally. Yet, Zhang contends, being “highly self-interested and devoid of any moral purpose”, the CCP has fallen short ‘on two key normative dimensions of ethical relationalism’ (Zhang, 2015, p. 175).

Although Zhang and Harnisch, Bersick and Gottwald’s volumes are informed by different theoretical sensibilities and have different empirical foci, they speak to each other in various important ways. First, both books incorporate China’s present and past into IR theorizing, conceiving of China not as a passive by-stander or a participant in an order whose rules were set by others and imposed on China in moments of historical weakness, but as an active player. Their theories are based on constructivist and critical approaches to IR, specifically interactionist approaches. Zhang constructs a fascinating Chinese-Western theoretical hybrid in ethical relationalism, whereas Harnisch, Bersick and Gottwald contribute to role theory. Both make interactions and relations a core concern of their enquiry. *China’s International Roles*, despite the selective choice of case studies, makes a persuasive case that China’s interactions with various countries and organizations suggest that she has no unified vision of order. Moreover, China’s own identity appears to change dramatically over time, from a developing socialist nation to a rising power and sometimes both.

Like Zhang, Shih and Huang, in their contribution to *China’s International Roles* draw on *relational grand strategy* to highlight the vagueness of Chinese grand strategy which, in turn, has important implications for China’s rise and for global governance (Shih and Huang, 2016, p. 59). China, they argue, may not have developed a substantive, self-ascribed role to cope with her rise, thereby explaining her hesitation in reshaping the international system and its rules. Alternatively, they claim, China may have a clear conception of her international role but it has failed to convey

it to others (Shih and Huang, 2016, p. 65). Both are of course possible, although the specificity of each relationship (uniqueness, according to Shih and Huang) suggests that there may not be an overarching set of values – let alone a grand strategy – steering China’s foreign policy (Shih and Huang, 2016, pp. 62-65). China’s purpose is to exercise a self-restraining role in exchange for other countries accepting its progress (p. 67). China’s assumption of the role of a “responsible major power” (*yige fuzeren de daguo*) hinges on the functioning of an interaction, a relationship with another international actor (p. 67). As Chen (2016, p. 110) notes in the same volume, roles and conceptions of role are shaped and changed through interactions between states, and a country’s international role is determined as much as by domestic expectations – and the debate surrounding them – as by the multiplicity of external expectations, all of which converge in a multidimensional understanding of China’s international role (p. 115). Gottwald adds that China found it difficult to live up to expectations engendered by her emerging global economic dominance and argue that as China adjusts and seeks to carve a new role for herself, she is testing out alternative leadership roles (p. 127). International roles are shaped by domestic imperatives and foreign expectations (Harnisch et al., 2016, p. 246).

While change in a country’s international roles is possible, this occurs with parsimony (Harnisch et al., 2016, p. 255). China’s leadership has to make hard choices between conflicting domestic and external expectations. The authors expect that role conflicts will arise from two competing social orders – the domestic and the international (Harnisch et al., 2015, p. 246). These role conflicts, however, do not inherently threaten international stability, but they could make that order more volatile.

China bears a strong influence on Asian political and economic order but she does not shape it singlehandedly. Therefore relational approaches, such as Zhang’s ethical relational model or Harnisch, Bersick and Gottwald’s much-improved role theory, are especially suited to analyze the emergence of a new post-Western international order in Asia. Beyond the broader question of the US-China relationship, there is considerable interest in the evolution of China-Russia relations which was especially fractious during the Cold War. Kaczmariski’s (2015) *Russia-China relations in the Post-Crisis International Order* examines an important puzzle in power transition theory – the gap in material power between China and Russia grew wider since the global crisis but that

power asymmetry neither led to tensions nor did it restrict Sino-Russian cooperation. On the contrary, the pace of rapprochement actually accelerated (Kaczmarski, 2015, p. 165). The author asks: what factors account for the durability of Russia-China relations after the Cold War; why has Russia not balanced against China's rise; and why has China exercised self-restraint vis-à-vis Russia? To answer these questions, Kaczmarski goes beyond the conventional "axis of convenience" versus "strategic partnership" debate, and draws on power transition theory. Despite the voluminous literature on this theory, it curiously receives only a cursory examination in the book. Be that as it may, Kaczmarski argues that "the global crisis contributed to the transformation of the relationship and fostered a peaceful power transition between Russia and China" (2015, p. 3). This *socially-negotiated power transition* (2015, pp. 4, 165) is characterized by broader cooperation, overcoming "long-term deadlocks, especially in the energy sphere," reconciling their "interests in their shared neighborhood – Central and East Asia," and the increased coordination of their global policies (2015, p. 1).

This bilateral relationship, according to Kaczmarski, may be less consequential than US-China relations for world order but the "quality of the relationship between the two most powerful non-liberal states has serious implications for the international order" (Kaczmarski, 2015, p. 1). Russia and China determine the political, security and economic order in Central Asia, from which the West has been *de facto* evicted. Russia has accommodated herself to the shift of power, whilst China has exercised self-restraint. Although the argument put forward by Kaczmarski is certainly plausible, a major test will be the extent to which Moscow and Beijing will be able, and willing, to reconcile their two major regional economic initiatives, the Eurasian Economic Union and the One Belt, One Road initiative. Will the United States show a willingness to peacefully adjust to the status of junior partner in the relationship with China, just like Russia did in the 1990s and 2000s? That seems unlikely, limiting what we might be able to infer from the study of that bilateral relationship on a more general level.

Shearman's edited volume, *Power Transition and International Order in Asia*, provides readers with a detailed overview of the manifold challenges for regional order. Shearman sees these challenges as a "tinderbox for crises and conflict" (p. 1) which are "due to the rise of China and changes in the patterns of power and politics in the region" (p. 189). The contributors examine

how the transition and diffusion of power in global politics are affecting territorial disputes in the South China Sea, the threat posed by North Korea and the rise of insurgencies in South-East Asia, crime and transnational terrorism. The authors note that not all of the challenges in the Asian Order are due to China's rise. Especially noteworthy, although controversial, is Cox's skepticism as to whether China has already overtaken the United States in key indicators of power. Cox takes issue with the argument that we have entered a post-Western era (Cox, 2014, p. 29). He states that "China [...] finds itself in the paradoxical position of having greater economic influence in Asia while at the same time having fewer friends" (p. 34). Even more crucially, Beijing "seems to have no idea of what its purpose is in the world" (p. 35), a cruder version of the broader argument that was discussed in the other books.

Limitations

The books under review explore the evolving international roles of China and how its rise affects her relationships with the United States and Russia, as well as its impact on Asian and global orders. Despite the significant contributions that these books make, they do have some limitations. Kaczmarek, for example, does a very good job of mapping the evolution of Sino-Russian relations over a wide variety of issues from energy to security, but the Sino-Russian relationship can hardly be described as one between a hegemonic great power and a rising power, which is at the heart of power transition theory. Russia's energy-fuelled boom in the 2000s has been a brief interlude in a long process of weakening, where the country's military might is confronted with long-term economic and demographic crises. Furthermore, Russia was not the structural actor in East Asia on the same scale as the United States. It would have been interesting to read more about Kaczmarek's take on whether the Sino-Russian partnership goes beyond simple opposition to a US-led international order and is guided by a shared view about the shape of a post-Western world. To Russia and China does the democratization of international relations mean anything apart from the end of US hegemony and the aspiration to have a seat at the table, *à la* Concert of Europe?

Shearman's *Power Transition and International Order in Asia* suffers from the shortcomings typical of many edited volumes – there is no common theoretical or analytical framework and a common set of guiding questions. Consequently, the chapters come across as somewhat disconnected from each other and from the whole endeavor. For example, the claims that “China is a danger to itself” (Shearman, 2014, p. 22) or that we are heading towards a new Cold War in Asia (Shearman, 2014, pp. 22-23) remain under-explored as the individual chapters do not engage with them directly. In addition, the issues tackled by the authors are definitely important, but there are no criteria provided for case selection. For example, why was Myanmar not included in the volume when it now plays a strategic role in Southeast Asia and is carving its own niche in regional politics? In the same vein, why was China's role in Central Asia excluded from the volume given its centrality to Beijing's energy security?

In Zhang's case, his neatly delineated empirical focus on Chinese hegemony during the Ming period is both an advantage and a disadvantage. The book helps readers obtain a clear grasp of history, but the author's attempt to use this historical analogy to make sense of China's evolving contemporary role is not fully developed, thereby limiting the generalizability of his historically-contingent claims. This in no way invalidates Zhang's insights, but one is left wondering whether an excessive focus on the Confucian underpinning of China's hegemonic order limits the scope of his theoretical model and its broader applicability. One could also ask, what are the Confucian qualities of present-day Chinese foreign policy?

Zhang's correctly points out that the field of International Relations has long been western-centric, but his argument that a relational theory which incorporates ethics and values (Confucianism, broadly put) is starkly different from western IR breaks down in the face of his acknowledgement that the notion of *ethical relationalism* has significant parallels with the contributions of Lebow and Buzan (Buzan & Zhang, 2012; Lebow, 2003). Moreover, modern conceptions of sovereignty are starkly at odds with the ‘all under heaven’ approach of Ming-era Chinese hegemony, further narrowing the applicability of that approach. A more serious challenge is that China's ‘go global’ strategy (走出去, *zou chuqu*) has the potential to transform China's identity and role conception, and its political consequences may prove even more significant than its global economic ramifications (Dessein, 2016, p. 32).

Finally, there are several themes that were given short shrift in the volumes. This is perhaps less a direct criticism of the four volumes under review and more a call for further research. One such issue is energy and environment, made even more topical by the United States's decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in 2017. China's role in economic and financial governance is covered in Gottwald and Huotari's chapters in Harnisch et al.'s book and Kaczmarek's book touches on Russia-China relations in the energy sphere, but this field remains under-explored and warrants further investigation. This is not to say that, individually, these topics are not discussed in the literature. China's role in global economic governance is being subjected to closer scrutiny, both on its own terms (Tellis & Mirski, 2013) and as a member of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) (De Graaf & Colgan, 2016; Kim, 2018 forthcoming). Nicolas (2016), in particular, has noted China's evolution from a passive rule-taker to a reformist to an outright challenger of international rules and this argument is consistent with Harnisch et al. Christoffersen (2016) has shown that China has tried to create an alternative global energy order and establish leadership of the BRICS, while facing some limits, arguably as a result of the heterogeneity of the BRICS and their contrasting agendas (Downie, 2015; Fumagalli, 2018, forthcoming). China might be able to drive reforms in global governance, but she has no clear vision of the new order she wishes to create. Overall, the books under review seem to suggest that China is currently not a revisionist power, yet we still do not have a clear understanding of the kind of order she wants, quite possibly because she does not know the answer herself.

Conclusion and Way Forward

Taken together, these four books advance our understanding of China's rise and its regional and global implications. The key question is whether China will seek integration into the current order or pursue change, and if so to what extent. Although we do not get an answer to that question in any of these books – although they all seem inclined to the view that China is accommodating to the current order rather than challenging it – they do offer a detailed assessment of a number of contemporary empirical and policy issues as well as a solid grounding in Chinese history (especially Zhang's book); they also make excellent use of primary sources (particularly Zhang and Harnisch et al.). Zhang's work on "grand strategy and relations theory" and Harnisch et al.'s

exploration of China's changing international roles contribute significantly to our understanding of China's role and impact by extending their analysis beyond the commonly used dichotomy of power transition versus balance of power. Drawing on extensive research they add nuance and complexity to our understanding of China's rise and will serve as useful reference points for scholars of China, regional order in Asia and global order. Future research should build on some of the work in these books, particularly where it sheds light on the kind of actor China seeks to be and the role she is constructing for herself. Energy, economic, financial and environmental governance are useful starting points for this research and for exploring the ways in which domestic politics often constrain and shape Beijing's external conduct. Lastly, as China's \$1 trillion "One Belt, One Road" initiative unfolds and connects China to the four corners of the globe via a dense rail, sea, and road network, scholars should also begin to assess its initial impact on China's impact on order beyond her immediate neighborhood.

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